



Nell Emerald

Also Known As:

Mrs. N. Beattie, Ellen Maud O'Shea

Lived:

October 29, 1882 - June 21, 1969

Worked as:

company co-director, film actress, music hall performer, producer, screenwriter

Worked In:

United Kingdom: England

by Tony Fletcher

Ellen Maud O'Shea was born on October 29, 1882, in Soho, London. Both her parents were Irish. They had five daughters, and each sister had a stage name: Sarah Emily was known as Eily Adair, Alice Mary as Norah, Julia Blanche as Monie Mine, Ellen Maud as Nell, and Constance Gladys as Connie.

Eily and Norah, the two eldest sisters, had a specialty act that was a version of the Alexandre Dumas classic *The Corsican Brothers*. Their mother worked as manager for "The Sisters O'Shea, Irish Duettists and Comedy Dancers." Ernest De Vere, the manager of the Cambridge music hall, finally changed their name to "The Emerald Sisters," and they became regulars on the Moss and Stoll Theatre circuits and toured abroad. All the sisters, apart from the youngest, Connie, took turns in the act.

When she was twenty-eight, Nell married David George Beattie, also known as Charles Beattie, on August 9, 1910. This brought a change to her career. At Charles's request she stopped performing in variety and music hall shows. It was around this period that Nell entered the film industry both as actress and producer, working throughout most of the 1910s in various film companies located at Brighton and Shoreham on the south coast of England. One of these companies, the Brighton Film Company, was registered on May 7, 1913, with a capital of £1,000 and a film factory at Hampton Street in Brighton. The two company directors listed were W. H. Speer, managing director, and Mrs. N. Beattie, indicating that Nell was also known professionally by her married surname.

W. Harold Speer had been involved in the variety business for some years. In January 1901, his cinematograph and variety combination had appeared at Pirbright Hall, Woking. In March of the same year, he showed *Aladdin* on the Ventiscope at the Royal in Ryde on the Isle of Wight. He later became proprietor of the Queen's Theatre in Brighton, and on October 5, 1911, he launched Biocolour Films, a system invented by William Friese-Greene, which led to litigation over a number of years with the rival color company of Charles Urban and G. A. Smith with their Kinemacolor. Speer also founded Brighton and County Film Company, producing two fiction films released in May 1912: *A Nurse's Devotion* and *The Motor Bandits*. In addition he had a distribution company, the Popular Film Company, at 20 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, London.

The Brighton Film Company released six fiction films between May and July 1913: *Tracking the Baby*; *East Lynne*; *Mercia*, *The Flower Girl*; *Wanted: A Husband*; *The Grip of Iron*; and *Flying from Justice*. Nell acted in at least four of these. She played Lady Isobel in *East Lynne*; Mercia in *Mercia*, *the Flower Girl*; Cora Simmonet in *The Grip of Iron*; and Mildred Parkes in *Flying from Justice*.

An advertisement in *The Cinema* on June 4, 1913, stated that “Miss Nell Emerald, the producer and leading lady (late of the Prince of Pilsen Company and John Hart's Company), is a well known and popular actress” (n.p.). At least two of her sisters were also in the Brighton Company—Monnie Mine and Eily Adair. Nell continued her acting career with the Progress Film Company at Shoreham in Sussex where Sidney Morgan was a director. She acted in features throughout the 1920s, and in the late 1930s returned to producing films. She ventured into writing scenarios, one of which, *This Week of Grace* (1933), became a Gracie Fields feature. She died on June 21, 1969, at eight-seventeen years old, by which time she would have seen her niece, the actress Ida Lupino, make a directorial career for herself in the United States.

Bibliography

The Cinema (4 June 1913): n.p.

Gifford, Denis. *The British Film Catalogue*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973.

Low, Rachael. *History of the British Film. Vol. II: 1906-14*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1949.

Lupino, Stanley. *From the Stocks to the Stars*. London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1934.

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Nell Emerald as Actress

A Lowland Cinderella. Dir.: Sidney Morgan (Progress Film Company UK 1921) cas.: Nell Emerald, George Foley, Joan Morgan, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

The Mayor of Casterbridge. Dir./sc.: Sidney Morgan (Progress Film Company UK 1921) cas.: Nell Emerald, Fred Groves, Mavis Clair, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Nell Emerald as Actress and Producer

East Lynne, 1913; *Flying from Justice*, 1913; *The Grip of Iron*, 1913; *Mercia*, *The Flower Girl*, 1913.

2. Nell Emerald as Producer

Tracking the Baby, 1913; *Wanted a Husband*, 1913.

3. Nell Emerald as Actress

A Bold Adventure, 1915; *Sweet and Twenty*, 1919; *Fires or Innocence*, 1922; *The Lilac Sunbonnet*, 1922; *Rouges of the Turf*, 1923; *Chester Forgets Himself*, 1924; *The Gold Cure*, 1925; *A Girl of London*, 1925; *The King's Highway*, 1927.

Citation

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<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-nell-emerald/>>